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Guest Editorial

Why A Community College

(Editorial by Radio Station WMNC)

Whether Burke County is to have a community college will be determined by its citizens Saturday, March 21.

Burke citizens will go to the polls in a special election that day with the fate of the college in their hands.

Approval of a local supplement for construction and operation will make the college a reality. A negative vote will doom the effort to failure.

To provide the necessary local supplement, Burke citizens will be asked to approve a one-million-dollar bond issue and give authorization for the county to appropriate from tax or non-tax revenue an amount not to exceed five cents for \$100 property valuation.

Once again it is pointed out to the people of Burke County that only about half of the million dollars they are being asked to approve through a bond issue may have to be used, the State having promised to match the cost of construction provided money is available in surplus funds at the end of the current fiscal year.

In addition, the State will appropriate \$600,000 for equipping the college building and bear the major cost of operation.

It is estimated that Burke County's share of the operation expenses will be fifteen per cent or less.

The State will require Burke County, however, to bear the expense of keeping up grounds and building, which will cost an estimated \$35,000 annually.

The people of Burke County are being assured that should a tax levy be necessary that it will not exceed five cents on the \$100 valuation, perhaps only three cents.

And there is the strong possibility that no tax levy at all would be necessary. However, the State requires that the county have the authority to levy a college-supporting tax should it become necessary.

In any event, the levy, the people of Burke are assured, would never amount to more than one-twentieth of one per cent of the property valuation, which means that a person with \$10,000 in taxable property would pay in all probability three dollars per years with a maximum of five dollars.

Whether Burke County citizens are willing to pay the price for a comprehensive community college that would provide a regular two-year college course, in addition to vocational, trade and technological opportunities will be seen, of course, when they have cast their ballots in the special election March 21.

Burke County had a college once—a college of great merit that afforded educational opportunities for youth from near and far, some of them who likely would have been deprived of a college education otherwise.

And now Burke County has the opportunity of having another college. The comprehensive community college that is proposed has been approved by the State Board of Education. Other counties sought the college.

The history of schools in Burke County dates back to 1783, when Morgan Academy was chartered. A number of the other academies followed, including Table Rock. In 1876, Robert Logan Patton, a native of Burke, graduated from Amherst College and returned home to teach. Mr. Patton said he wished to put education in easier reach of others than it had been for him. He taught in Burke County for nearly half a century.

The first State public schools in Burke County were maintained by local taxation matched by appropriations from the Literary Fund set up in 1825.

Burke County has been without a college of its own since famed Rutherford College closed its doors in the 1930's.

It is estimated that the total cost of operation of the community college now being proposed for Burke County will be about \$600 a year per student. The total cost to the full-time student himself will be about \$200 annually, including a tuition fee of approximately \$120.

The site chosen for the proposed community college is on North Carolina School for Deaf property near the interchange of U. S. Highway 64 and Interstate Highway 40.

The way has been paved. The rest will be up to the voting citizens of Burke County.